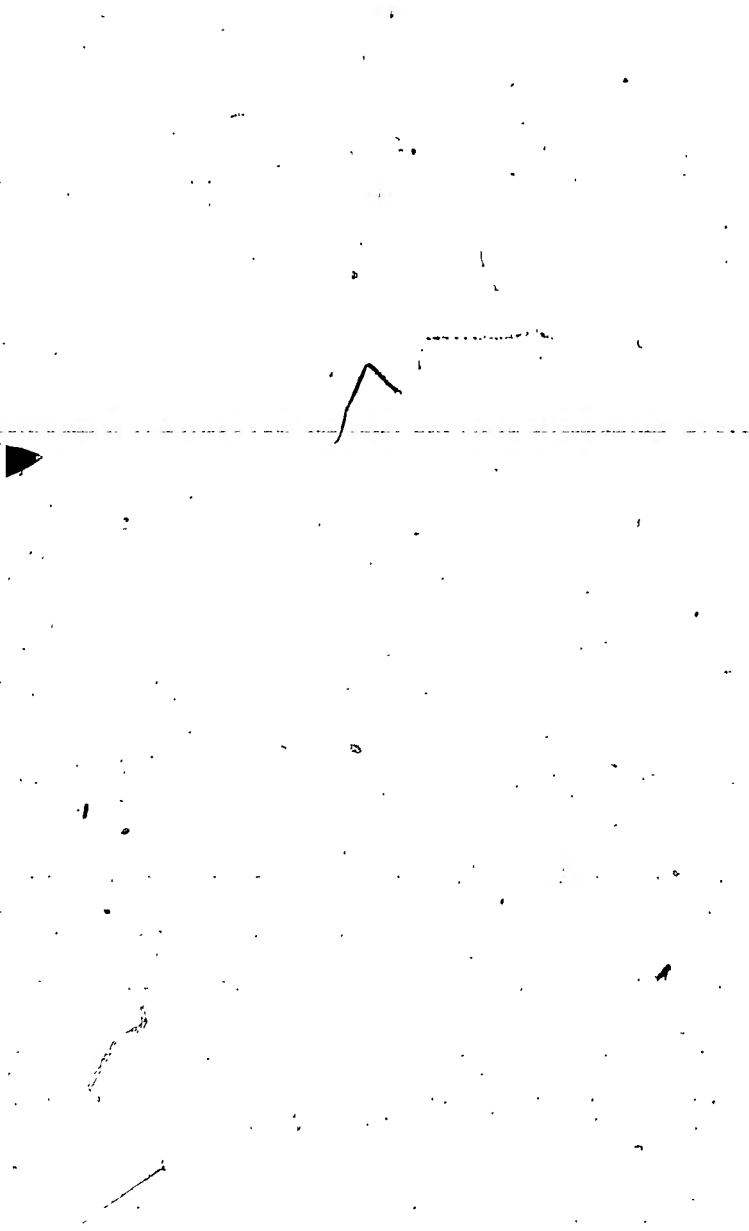


OVERGROWN TRAILS

DAVIES





Overgrown Trails

AND OTHER POEMS

By TANIS

The homesteads dot the prairies,
The roads are straight and strange;
Oh, where are the trails of yester-year,
And where is the open range?

To the Pioneers of the Canadian West

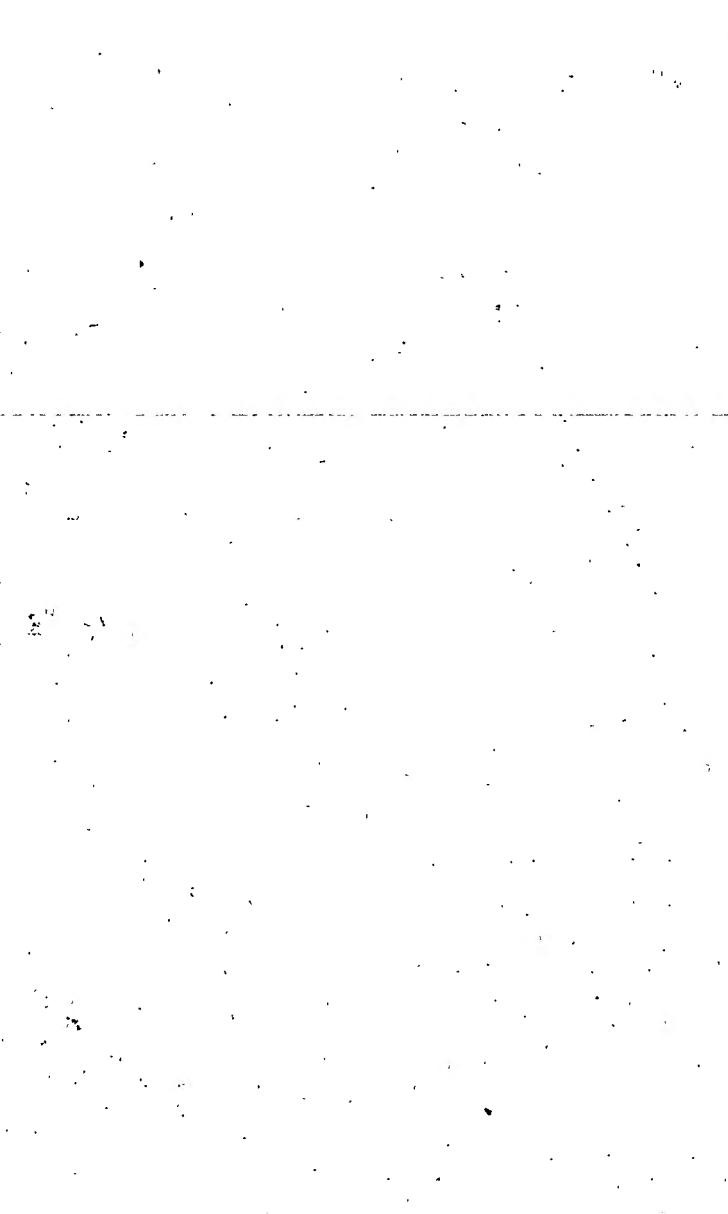


The shining skies give welcome,
The foothills call me home,
But the trails we used to wander,
Alas, are overgrown.



CONTENTS

	Page
<i>The Overgrown Trail</i>	1
<i>The Spruce</i>	2
<i>Evening</i>	3
<i>Ki-nic-a-nic</i>	4
<i>The Watering Place</i>	6
<i>Red River Cart</i>	7
<i>The Cowboy</i>	8
<i>Camp at Night</i>	10
<i>Waiting</i>	11
<i>Lake Louise</i>	12
<i>Canada Grey Goose</i>	14
<i>Coyote</i>	15
<i>Night-Herd</i>	16
<i>Friendship</i>	18



The Overgrown Trail

IT crept along the hillside
And through the valley's shade,
Then far across the open plain
Three furrowed lines it made.

It was an old and trusted friend
That led from home to home;
Now almost lost mid prairie flowers,
With grasses overgrown.

Oh, let the wandering mood prevail,—
Forget the city street
And wander down the grassgrown trail
With memories old and sweet.

There let the prairie breezes blow
Away the mists of time;
And dream the dreams of other days,
And hum the old loved rhyme.

The Spruce

WHEN Cree and Blackfoot made their
truce
They sat them down by a tree of
spruce,

And there on the Peace Hill's rounded crest
They buried their hatchets, and said, "Oh, Rest!"
The spruce tree to itself had said—
"I shall be here when these men are dead."

So it lorded it over the prairies grand,
A sentinel guide in a peaceful land,
And often in its deep green shade
The pioneers' children happily played.
The balm and the poplar grew close by,
But the old spruce towered toward the sky.

Since childhood's days I'd known that tree,—
'Twas just like a dear old friend to me.
Then I wandered back, but just to find
By many friends I was left behind;
So I turned to the hill, my heart a load,—
And they'd cut down the tree,—to mend a road.

Evening

A LONG the quiet lake's green rim
The wild duck to her nest doth skim.
The snipe calls shrilly to his mate,
'The loon's laugh floats across the lake.
A boat pulls slowly to the shore,—
The rower rests upon his oar;
The zephyrs through the grasses cease,—
'Tis evening in the Hills of Peace.

Ki-nic-a-nic

(Indian tobacco made from the inner bark of the red willow).

THE willows red, with graceful leaves
Which sway to every prairie breeze,
So peaceful grow beside the lake,
Or softly fringe the coulee brake.

Beside the river bank it grows,
Its shadows dark the wild duck knows,
For there she builds her shallow nest;—
She knows the willows screen the best.

And in the shade the willows make
Sweet sleep the waves of stream and lake.
The spirit of the willow tree,
Speaks peace and sweet tranquillity.

In days long past the Indian maid
Oft bent beneath the willow's shade
And cut the tender, slender shoots
That grow from the red willow roots.

And ere the twilight glade would fill,
Toward the teepee on the hill
She'd turn her dark and sombre eyes
And see the smokes from campfires rise.

With arms well filled with willows red
She trod the path that homeward led,
Then all would sit about the camp
And peel and scrape those willows damp.

From distant camps would tom-toms drum
Mingled with talk and busy hum,
And strong brown hands, so deft and quick
Would make for smokes, Kinicanic.

The spirit of the willow tree
Brings solace sweet where're it be;
In growing casts its restful shade,
Peace in the Indian camp it made,

For braves would fill their pipes and think;
It soothed and smoothed like cooling drink.
With it they smoked the pipes of peace,
And vowed and prayed all fighting cease.

And as the blue smoke curled on high,
They thought of lakes where wild ducks fly
And glades where they the buffalo slew,
And places where the willow grew.

'Twas peace to see them sit and puff,
With pipes made of the red stone rough,
And 'round them all there seemed to be
The Spirit of the Willow Tree.

The Watering Place

'TIS evening where the waters meet,
The cattle come with patient feet.
Mild-eyed they turn the water from,
Long shadows lay the path along.
Slaked is their thirst and cool their feet,
They seek the pastures' green retreat.
The mating birds their songs have told,—
A benediction sweet and old.

Red River Cart

WINTERS' snows and summers' rains
Met you as you crossed the plains,
But your heart was brave and strong
Like the ones you brought along.

Groaning, creaking as, you'd start,
Just an old Red River cart,
Held in one by wooden bolts,
Bravely taking all the jolts.

Sides held up by leather thong,
O'er the trail so rough and long.
Hidden in the greenwood here
Sinking lower year by year.

What a story you could tell,
Of a life lived long and well;
Here for years you must have stood,—
Bleached and whitened is your wood.

Children climbed your wheels and played
When at evening camp they stayed.
I always feel you have a heart,
Worn-out, tired Red River cart.

Rest you now, your journey o'er,
Along the trail you'll creak no more.
Quietly I turn away,—
Leave you in the twilight grey.

The Cowboy

I SAW him oft, in a bygone day,
Saddle his horse in the morning grey,
Then off to the range with an early start,
A smile in his eye and a song in his heart.

A loose rein held in a grip of steel,—
The squeeze of his knees the horse could feel;
With happy jingle of spur and bit
Oh, never a horse but he could sit!!

The morning sun rose warm and high,
And clouds like thistledown flecked the sky.
With eyes well trained to the prairie wild
He looked to a distant ranch and smiled.

He sang the love-songs of his day,—
And always changed the eyes to grey!
He changed the name from time to time
And hummed it when it would not rhyme.

He watched the herds on the prairie grand,
A gentle scene in a lovely land,
Where peace and plenty from the plains
Blest honest labor with its gains.

No more that rider rides the range;
At the old ranch home there is many a change.
Gone is the girl with the eyes of grey
But I feel she is not far away;—

Sometimes at eve of a summer day,
When wild birds call and the grasses sway,
And sunset golden tips the hills,
And mystic gloom the valley fills,

I hear the thud of their horses' feet,
And hear their voices, clear and sweet,
As the spirits of Bill and his sweetheart Nell
Ride through the hills they loved so well.

Camp at Night

THE sun has passed the near hill's crest,
The horses on their pickets rest;
The purple shades of distant hills
Melt as the twilight distance fills.

The tree forms mingle with the night,
Only is seen the tent of white;
And embers from the fire glow.
The firefly passes to and fro.

And all within the camp is rest.
With moon and stars the night is blest.
A cowbell tinkles on the hill,—
A night-owl hoots,—and all is still.

Waiting

HIS grave within a field in France
With small white cross is crowned;
Hers, in the foothills of the West,
Where flowers bloom around.

And high above her resting place
The snow-capped Rockies gleam,
And prairie grasses gently nod
And bid her sweetly dream.

And prairie birds sing softer notes
While gliding in their flight,
And summer suns shine brightly there,
And winter snows lay light.

Two quiet graves, in grasses deep,
Mother and son have gone to sleep.
Past is the strife and past the storm:
They wait in the hush before the Morn.

Lake Louise

THE sunset lent a fringe of gold
And rosy hues to the snowpeaks cold,
While shadows of the evening still,
Darkened to gloom beneath the hill.

Afar below on the quiet lake
From glistening prow the bubbles break;
From dripping oars the waters ran,
While muted voices, maid and man,
Above the waters, inky blue,
Were borne on a breeze that scarcely blew.

A French girl sang, our hearts to please;
Sank o'er the calm of Lake Louise.
At first it was a boating song,
Then of a love that tarried long;
Then to her heart she gave full rein,
Sang of a love across the main,
Sang in a tender, pleading way
Songs of her homeland far away.
She seemed a sob in her heart to hold,
Secret and sweet as a love untold,
Filled with passion and joy of life,
And a grand disdain for paltry strife,
And I knew her heart as I heard her sing,
For she played my soul like a violin!

Then her song, like a shadow, ceased to be;
A night-bird called from a distant tree.
The rower drew his boat ashore,
The song was gone, the dream was o'er.

Next day they left, those friends of chance,
For war-clouds hovered over France.
Back to her home where loved ones dear
Marched to the fight with song and cheer.
Back to the land of every day
Where people work and love and play,
But deep in my heart lies that shadow song
To treasure through life as the years pass on.

Again alone by Lake Louise
I heard the wind sob through the trees,
And the stately pines, so tall, so calm,
Whispered of peace from war's alarm.

The years passed by; 'twas Easter Day,
And faithful souls had come to pray.
The chapel grey with war was torn,
Where I chanced to stray that Easter Morn;—

That voice again! My heart stood still,
It seemed the raftered void to fill;
But changed the spirit of its dream,
Renunciation now its theme.
Not with life's lure and love's deep urge,
With which her springtime heart did surge,
But appealing to God in pleading tones
For succor and comfort for faithful ones.
She prayed to Him to ease their sighs,
To take all pain from their tear-dimmed eyes.
"Have pity on us, Oh Lord!" she sang.
"Peace to thy soul," the answer rang.

I had heard her heart on that distant day,
Now I heard her soul in that chapel grey.
When benediction had been said
I sought the verger, grey of head,
And asked who sang behind the screen.
" 'Tis Sister Agnes, of St. Jeanne."

There's a shadow song on Lake Louise
When the wind sobs softly through the trees,
When the lights from the Chalet all have gone,
And the quiet moon sails slowly on.
Then from the lapping waves I glean
Simply these words—It might have been.

Canada Grey Goose

ONE of the sounds I love to hear from
birds upon the wing
Is the honking of the grey goose, as he
journeys north in spring.

How I admire his cunning,— and oh, to have his
might!

And in my heart I envy him. I wish I had his
sight.

For he journeys from the sunny south across a
lovely land,

And far into the wondrous north he leads his
honking band.

Sees the ice break in the rivers, and the plows
turn brown to black;

Straight as an arrow flying, calling, shouting that
he's back.

He visits all the prairie lakes until the summer's
done,

And then he loiters on his way, unlike the way
he's come;

For miles of golden stubble field attract his
roving eye,

And he lingers in the land he loves till snow
begins to fly.

The Coyote

OFTEN seated by the fire I have heard the
plaintive howl

Of the coyote on the prairie, on his
nightly thieving prowl.

I have watched him in the moonlight raise aloft
his pointed nose,

And I've shivered as I've heard him, as if my
blood it froze.

His piercing shrill falsetto goes shrieking to the
sky,—

Why is it one feels creepy when one hears the
coyote's cry?

Because we hate his coward ways,—he'll never
stand and fight;

He always preys on smaller things, and always
that at night.

There's one good thing about him, and that's his
silky hide;

I love it soft, and tanned and stretched, before
the fireside.

Night-Herd

'T WAS on a ranch camp, years ago,
But some things fade from memory
slow;

Two of us by the campfire lay
Tired after a round-up day;
Propped on our elbows, smoking slow,
A thousand head on the plains below.

"I'm waiting for that lad to sing."—
This from an old-time rider, Jim.

Often I'd heard of that singing boy,
Who filled men's hearts with tears or joy.
He always sang when he rode night-herd,
And those restive cattle seldom stirred.

Now I heard the thud of his horse's feet,
And he sang of Afton, clear and sweet;
He sang of Annie's eyes so blue,
He sang that old Killarney, too.—
Sang them all in a tender tone,
As if each song were just his own.

Then, as he sang Sweet Long Ago,
Jim shaded his eyes from the firelight's glow.
"My dear old Mother, lad," said he,—
"She always sang that song to me.
The days have sure been tough and wild
Since I was just a little child."

May I not forget, as the years pass on,—
(For things have changed, and the range is gone)
The prairie; the stars, and the quiet night,
And old Jim's face in the dim firelight,
And a voice as sweet as I've ever heard,
The cowboy, riding his lone night-herd.

Friendship

TRUE friendship-maketh no demands:
'Tis just a heart that understands,
With kindly eyes, that know the truth.
'Twould blush to ask for word of proof.

And in its knowledge one can rest;—
True friendship calls from us our best.
I count him rich who true can say,
"Here is my friend, now come what may!"